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ABSTRACT

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INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AMONG UNMARRIED COLLEGE WOMEN

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Abstract

Investigations of physical assault have found that a substantial number of women have been victimized within the context of a dating relationship. The present study examined a wide range of interpersonal, attitudinal, personality, past history and demographic variables for 308 college women in order to understand what factors differentiate women in physically violent and nonviolent dating relationships. The study employed a 2 (abuse) x 2 (depression) design and as such was able to examine the unique effects of physical abuse without being confounded by the effects of depression. Twenty-one percent of the participants reported either current or past involvement in a physically abusive dating relationship. After controlling for depression, it was found that abused women employed poorer coping, had more social support, and experienced more sexual victimization than non-abused women. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Overview

During the 1980s and 1990s a considerable amount of research has been conducted on the prevalence and correlates of dating violence. Almost twenty years ago, Makepeace (1981) pioneered the study of physical violence in college students' dating relationships. From a sample of 202 students, he found that 21% had experienced some form of aggression in at least one dating relationship, and 61% knew of someone involved in an abusive dating relationship. With the publication of these results revealing the high rate of dating violence on college campuses, researchers began to look more closely at male-female violence in the context of a dating relationship. More recent studies have replicated the seminal work of Makepeace (1981) in finding that approximately three out of five college students know of someone involved in a violent dating relationship (Pedersen & Thomas, 1992), while approximately one in five college students have actually experienced dating violence firsthand (Cate, Henton, Koval, Christopher, & Lloyd, 1982; Makepeace, 1981; Pedersen & Thomas, 1992).

The frequency of dating violence becomes even more alarming when one considers the characteristic features of such aggression. Dating violence typically begins at age 15 or 16 (Henton, Cate, Koval, Lloyd, & Christopher, 1983), and increases in severity as the length of the relationship increases. Although both men and women perpetrate physically aggressive acts in dating relationships (Straus & Gelles, 1990), most researchers agree that women's use of aggression largely occurs in the context of self-defense or as a response to their partner's abuse (Lloyd & Emery, 1994). It is not surprising, then, that women report more feelings of victimization (Bernard & Bernard,

1983; Makepeace, 1981) and experience a greater degree of physical and emotional harm as compared with men (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1989).

As might be expected, less injurious forms of dating violence are much more common than more damaging acts (Stets & Pirog-Good, 1989). Cate et al. (1982) found that slapping one's partner, for instance, was reported by 13% to 61% of the high school and college students they surveyed. More serious forms of violence (i.e., those likely to result in a grave physical injury) are much less common, with prevalence rates ranging from 1% to 4%. Recurring episodes of violence are not uncommon if the relationship is not terminated (Cate et al., 1982). The available evidence indicates that if violence occurs once in a dating relationship, it is likely to occur again (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). Among those who experienced violence in a relationship, the mean number of such incidents was 9.6 (Roscoe & Benaske, 1985). Given this frequency, it is not surprising that physical injury is a common outcome of dating violence. In one study, 53% of the women who experienced dating violence reported that they sustained an injury due to the violence (Makepeace, 1988).

In addition to physical injuries incurred through dating violence, abused women also experience a great deal of psychological trauma (Golding, 1999). Specifically, women abused in dating relationships are significantly more likely to evidence depressive symptomatology as compared with women not abused in dating relationships. Magdol, Moffitt, Caspi, Newman, Fagan, & Silva (1997) reported that victims of dating violence are characterized by higher levels of depression, anxiety, and lower self-esteem than women who have had no experience with dating violence.

These studies provide a fairly descriptive picture of the nature and prevalence of dating violence. More recent research in the area of dating violence has focused more closely on the factors that discriminate between women in violent and nonviolent relationships. Researchers have highlighted variables that differentiate women in violent and nonviolent married relationships and examined these variables in the context of unmarried dating relationships. These variables have been classified according to their focus into one of five categories: demographic, psychological, attitudinal, past history, and interpersonal (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989). However, unlike the literature regarding spousal violence, there is a distinct dearth of studies investigating the interpersonal variables that potentially differentiate unmarried women in violent and nonviolent dating relationships. The goal of the present study, therefore, is to examine interpersonal variables in addition to demographic, psychological, attitudinal, and past history variables, to understand those factors that differentiate women in violent and nonviolent dating relationships.

Methodological Problems of Past Studies

Methodologically, the study of dating violence has been plagued with a number of problems. One major weakness with past research is the narrow focus taken by most studies. That is, most analyses examine one or two variables exclusively, and thus make a comprehensive picture of dating violence difficult to create.

Another methodological problem with past research is the lack of data on interpersonal variables that differentiate women in violent and nonviolent relationships. Past research has established a relationship between interpersonal variables and violence

in married relationships. Specifically, compared with women in non-abusive married relationships, women in abusive married relationships tend to use poorer coping strategies (Claerhout et al., 1982), be less assertive (Warren & Lanning, 1992) and experience more social isolation (Meyers-Abell & Jansen, 1980). In addition, women abused in marriage have typically experienced a greater degree of violence in their families of origin, as well as a greater degree of past sexual victimization. The various similarities between women abused in marriage and women abused in dating relationships suggest that interpersonal variables need to be studied in the context of unmarried dating relationships.

A final methodological problem with past research is the use of a two group design, comparing abused women with non-abused women. This type of design is problematic due to the confounding effects of depression. That is, many of the differences found between the two populations of women may be better accounted for by the higher prevalence of depression in the abused group (Golding, 1999).

The Present Study

The goal of the present study was to investigate a wide range of interpersonal, attitudinal, personality, past history, and demographic variables within the same study to understand what factors differentiate women in violent and nonviolent dating relationships. Past research has essentially neglected the role interpersonal variables may play in differentiating these women. As such, the present study specifically examined the significance of interpersonal variables in differentiating women in violent and nonviolent dating relationships. In particular, interpersonal functioning, assertiveness, social

support, coping, family violence, and past sexual victimization were examined to determine if they differentiate women in violent and nonviolent dating relationships.

In an effort to clearly examine the differences among women due to physical abuse, this study compared abused women with non-abused women while controlling for depression. Such comparisons are likely to illuminate the unique effects of physical violence among dating women without being confounded by the effects of depression among these women.

Major Hypotheses

Interpersonal. Past research has suggested that difficulties in interpersonal functioning characterize battered women (Walker, 1979; 1984). Because of the number of similarities between women abused in a married relationship and women abused in a dating relationship, Hypothesis One is that abused women in dating relationships will have poorer interpersonal functioning than non-abused women within the same depression category. Specifically, it is expected that within the same depression group, abused women will be more introverted, unassertive, exploitable, expressive, and nurturant as compared with non-abused women. Finally, it is expected that within the same depression group, abused women will be less autocratic and competitive as compared with non-abused women.

Social support. Past research has consistently found that battered women tend to be more socially isolated than non-battered women (Forte, et al. 1996; Walker, 1979). As such, Hypothesis Two is that women abused in dating relationships will be more socially isolated than women not-abused within the same depression category. Specifically, it is

expected that within the same depression category, abused women will have less social support from both friends and family as compared with non-abused women.

Coping. Studies by Forte et al. (1996) and Claerhout et al. (1982) indicated that battered women are unassertive, socially isolated, and have poor coping strategies. Therefore, Hypothesis Three is that women in violent dating relationships will have poorer coping strategies than non-abused women in the same depression category. Specifically, it is hypothesized that abused women will use distancing, self-isolation, wishful-thinking, and self-blame as coping strategies more often than non-abused women within the same depression category. It is also expected that within the same depression category, abused women will use problem-focused coping, seeking social support, emphasizing the positive, and tension-reduction as coping strategies less frequently than non-abused women.

Assertiveness. Past research has established that battered women are unassertive compared with non-battered women (Walker, 1979). Hypothesis Four is that abused women will be less assertive than non-abused women.

History of Family Violence and Past Sexual Victimization. Hypothesis Five is that within the same depression category, abused women will be more likely to have a history of experiencing violence from their parents as compared with non-abused women. Involvement in abusive intimate relationships after observation or experience with past abuse has been found previously by Bernard and Bernard (1983), Follingstad et al. (1992), and Sigelman et al. (1984). It is also expected that within the same depression

category, abused women will have more experience with sexual victimization as compared with non-abused women.

Method

Participants

Three hundred and eight female introductory psychology students from a large midwestern university participated in this study. The vast majority of participants were heterosexual (98.1%), Caucasian (93.5%) women who had never been married (99.7%). Most of the women were enrolled in their first year of college (75%), were 18 to 19 years old (84.2%), and dated casually (52.4%) or were in a monogamous relationship (36.3%).

Participants were grouped into 4 categories: (1) Abused/Depressed; (2) Abused/Not-Depressed; (3) Not-Abused/Depressed; and (4) Not-Abused/Not-Depressed based on their responses to the Dating subscale of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979), the Dating Experiences Questionnaire (DEQ), and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1988). Participants endorsing any of the following six statements in the severe range on the Conflict Tactics Scale qualified as abused for this study: (1) He slapped me; (2) He kicked, bit, or hit me with a fist; (3) He hit or tried to hit me with something; (4) He beat me up; (5) He threatened me with a knife or a gun; and (6) He used a knife or gun against me. For the purposes of this study, the abused groups were comprised of women currently in abusive relationships as well as women with past involvement in an abusive relationship. Accordingly, women not reporting past or current involvement in an abusive relationship qualified as the non-abused group.

The BDI-II was used to measure depression. A cut-off score of 14, indicating mild depression, was used to separate women into either a depressed or a non-depressed group. A score of 14 or above placed a woman in the depressed category, while a score of 13 or below placed a woman in the non-depressed category. Group data are summarized in Table 1.

Procedure

Participants completed a packet of questionnaires designed to assess dating status, interpersonal functioning, assertiveness, social support, coping strategies, history of family violence, past sexual experiences, and current psychological adjustment. After completing all questionnaires, participants were debriefed and awarded experimental credit for their participation. At this time questions about the study were fielded.

Data Analysis

Three 2 (Abuse: abused, not abused) x 2 (Depression: depressed, not depressed) between-subject multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were performed to examine whether women differed on interpersonal functioning, coping, and social support. Separate 2 (Abuse: abused, not abused) x 2 (Depression: depressed, not depressed) univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to determine whether women differed on assertiveness and psychological functioning. Three chi-square analyses were performed to determine if family history of violence, PTSD, or past sexual victimization differentiated abused participants from non-abused participants.

Table 1

Frequency and Percent of Women in each Category Based on Abuse and Depression Status

Status	N	%
Abused/Depressed	40	12.9
Abused/Not-Depressed	26	8.4
Not-Abused/Depressed	128	41.4
Not-Abused/Not-Depressed	114	36.9
Total	308	100

Such analyses will detect if abused women differ from non-abused women across symptomatic, interpersonal, and past history variables independent of how depression effects these variables. Specifically, comparisons between abused and non-abused women with depression, as well as comparisons between abused and non-abused women without depression were made. As such, any discrepancies among these group comparisons were attributable to the presence of abuse, and not confounded by the presence of depression.

Results

Interpersonal Variables

Interpersonal functioning. A 2 (Abuse: abused, not abused) x 2 (Depression: depressed, not depressed) between-subjects MANOVA was conducted on the eight subscales of the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP; Horowitz, Rosenbery, Baer, Ureno, & Villasenor, 1988). Evaluations of the assumptions of multicollinearity, normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance yielded satisfactory results. The eight subscales were overly-autocratic, overly-competitive, overly-cold, overly-introverted, overly-subassertive, overly-exploitable, overly-expressive, and overly-nurturant. With the use of Wilk's criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by depression, F (8, 297) = 9.78, $p \leq .05$, but not by abuse, F (8, 297) = .62, $p \geq .05$ or their interaction. F (8, 297) = 1.05, $p \geq .05$. To investigate the impact of the main effect for depression on the individual dependent variables, individual univariate F-tests were conducted.

Unique contributions to predicting differences between depressed and not-depressed women were made by each of the eight subscales of interpersonal functioning, such that depressed women were more interpersonally distressed than non-depressed women for each subscale (see Table 2 for a summary of these data).

Social Support. A second 2 (Abuse: abused, not abused) x 2 (Depression: depressed, not depressed) between-subjects MANOVA was performed on the two subscales of the Provision of Social Relations Scale (Family and Friend). Evaluations of the assumptions of multicollinearity, normality, linearity, and homogeneity of variance yielded satisfactory results. With the use of Wilk's criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by abuse status, $F(2, 302) = 3.97$, $p \leq .05$, but not by depression status, $F(2, 302) = 2.25$, $p \geq .05$, or their interaction, $F(2, 302) = 1.87$, $p \geq .05$. To investigate the impact of abuse on the individual dependent variables, separate univariate F-tests were performed.

Unique contributions to predicting differences between abused and non-abused women were made by seeking social support from friends, $F(1, 303) = 7.60$, $p \leq .05$, and seeking social support from families, $F(1, 303) = 4.34$, $p \leq .05$. These findings indicated that abused women were more likely to seek support from both friends and family than non-abused women (see Table 3 for a summary of these data).

Coping. A third 2 (Abuse: abused, not abused) x 2 (Depression: depressed, not depressed) between-subjects MANOVA was performed on the eight subscales of the Ways of Coping-Revised: (a) Problem Focused Coping; (b) Wishful Thinking; (c)

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Subscales of the Inventory of Interpersonal Problems (IIP).

	Abused Dep (n=40)		Abused Not Dep (n=26)		Not Abuse Dep (n=128)		Not Abuse Not Dep (n=114)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
IIP								
CMP	14.38	4.17	12.15	4.03	14.02	4.09	10.97	2.49
EXL	21.53	6.43	16.15	4.26	19.91	5.65	16.95	5.03
INT	16.90	6.89	12.73	4.24	16.66	5.80	12.99	4.34
NUR	17.78	5.47	14.27	3.74	16.66	5.57	13.60	3.78
SBA	21.18	6.90	14.46	5.48	19.95	6.18	16.27	5.37
CLD	15.40	4.52	11.96	4.24	14.78	5.68	10.99	2.95
EXP	22.80	5.72	15.96	4.49	20.38	5.87	16.63	4.99
ATC	13.65	4.34	12.42	4.25	13.60	4.27	10.97	2.69

Abbreviations: CMP=overly-competitive; EXL=overly-exploitable; INT= overly-introverted; NUR= overly-nurturant; SBA= overly-subassertive; CLD= overly-cold; EXP= overly-expressive; and ATC= overly-autocratic.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for the Subscales (Friend and Family) of the Provision of Social Relations (PSR).

	Abuse Dep (n=40)		Abuse Not Dep (n=26)		Not Abuse Dep (n=128)		Not Abuse Not Dep (n=113)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
PSR								
FND	17.42	6.24	18.38	6.91	16.88	4.63	15.28	3.28
FAM	12.38	4.89	11.88	3.58	11.83	3.64	10.42	2.26

Abbreviations: FND=Social support from friend; FAM=Social support from family

Distancing; (d) Seeking Social Support; (e) Emphasizing the Positive; (f) Self Blame; (g) Tension Reduction; and (h) Self Isolation.

Evaluations of the assumptions of multicollinearity, normality, and linearity yielded satisfactory results. The multivariate assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices was not satisfactory as evidenced by unequal cell sizes and a significant Box's M statistic, $\underline{F}$ (234, 5418) = 1.22, $\underline{p}$, < .05. However, examinations of the variances of the cells revealed that, in general, the smaller sample sizes generated larger variances, therefore the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices can be assumed.

With the use of Wilk's criterion, the combined dependent variables were significantly affected by both depression, $\underline{F}$ (8, 295) = 2.49, $\underline{p} \leq .05$ and abuse, $\underline{F}$ (8, 295) = 2.81, $\underline{p} \leq .01$, but not by their interaction $\underline{F}$ (8, 295) = .35, $\underline{p} \geq .05$. To investigate the impact of each main effect on the individual dependent variables, individual univariate F-tests were conducted.

Unique contributions to predicting differences between depressed and not-depressed women were made by distancing oneself as a coping strategy, $\underline{F}$ (1, 302) = 4.51, $\underline{p} \leq .05$, self-blame, $\underline{F}$ (1, 302) = 4.16, $\underline{p} \leq .05$, tension reduction, $\underline{F}$ (1, 302) = 11.74, $\underline{p} \leq .05$, and isolating oneself, $\underline{F}$ (1, 302) = 9.21, $\underline{p} \leq .05$. These finding were such that depressed women used these four coping strategies more frequently than non-depressed women.

Unique contributions to predicting differences between abused and non-abused women were made by wishful thinking, $\underline{F}$ (1, 302) = 9.72, $\underline{p} \leq .05$ and isolating oneself, $\underline{F}$

(1, 302) = 6.99, p ≤.05. These findings were such that abused women used wishful thinking and isolating oneself more frequently than non-abused women (see Table 4 for a summary of these data).

Assertiveness. A 2 (Abuse: abused, not abused) x 2 (Depression: depressed, not depressed) ANOVA was performed to examine differences among the women on the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS). The results of this ANOVA were not significant, F (3, 306)=1.30, p > .05. There were no differences among the four groups regarding assertiveness.

History of family violence and past sexual victimization. A chi-square analysis was performed on receiving physical violence from one's father while growing up. The results of this analysis revealed that there were no significant differences among the four groups with regard to receiving abuse from one's father, $\chi 2 = 8.22$, p ≥.05. It should be noted however, that the differences among the four groups approached significance (p= .08) and indicated a trend for abused women (both depressed and non-depressed) to have received abuse from their fathers more often as compared with non-abused women.

Another chi-square analysis was performed on receiving physical abuse from one's mother while growing up. The results of this analysis revealed no significant differences among the four groups with regard to receiving abuse from one's mother, $\chi 2 = 8.78$, p ≥.05. It should be noted again, however, that the differences among the four groups approached significance (p=.07), and indicated a trend for abused women (both depressed and non-depressed) to have received abuse from their mothers more often than

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for the Subscales of the Ways of Coping (WOC).

	Abuse Dep (n=40)		Abuse Not Dep (n=26)		No Abuse Dep (n=128)		No Abuse Not Dep (n=113)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
WOC								
Problem	14.85	5.59	15.73	4.71	15.69	5.64	15.38	6.08
Wish	10.82	4.11	10.23	3.23	9.58	3.96	8.00	4.00
Distance	8.23	4.99	7.00	4.46	7.48	3.37	6.39	3.73
Support	10.55	5.13	11.27	4.44	12.20	4.55	12.39	5.43
Positive	6.08	3.14	5.88	3.25	5.73	2.62	5.54	2.81
Blame	5.02	2.63	4.50	2.57	4.61	2.46	3.70	2.46
Tens R.	3.83	2.51	2.77	1.97	3.43	2.36	2.34	1.96
Isolation	4.07	2.12	2.92	2.15	3.04	2.20	2.39	1.93

Abbreviations: Problem=problem-focused; Wish=wishful thinking; Distance=distancing; Support=seeking social support; Positive-focusing on the positive; Blame=self-blame; Tens R.=tension reduction; and isolation=isolating oneself.

non-abused women.

A final chi-square was performed on sexual victimization since the age of 14. The results of this omnibus chi-square indicated that the four groups of women differed significantly with regard to past sexual victimization, $\chi 2 = 43.73$, $p<.01$. Because the omnibus chi-square was significant, a series of post hoc chi-square tests was performed for all combinations of group status taken two at a time. A Bonferroni correction was applied to the post hoc chi-square tests to control for the inflation of Type I error associated with multiple statistical analyses. Post hoc tests between status groups revealed that abused/not-depressed women were more likely to have experienced sexual victimization since the age of 14 as compared with not-abused/not-depressed, $\chi 2 = 12.96$, $p \leq .01$, OR = 4.83. Similarly, abused/depressed women were more likely to have experienced sexual victimization since the age of 14 as compared with not-abused/not-depressed, $\chi 2 = 39.19$, $p \leq .01$, OR = 14.52, and not-abused/depressed women, $\chi 2 = 14.41$, $p \leq .01$, OR = 5.41. Lastly, not-abused/depressed women were more likely to experience sexual victimization since the age of 14 as compared with not-abused/not-depressed women, $\chi 2 = 13.34$, $p \leq 01$, OR = 2.69. No other post hoc tests were statistically significant. The results of the post hoc chi-square tests reveal that abused/not-depressed women were 4.8 times more likely to experience sexual victimization than not-abused/not-depressed women. In addition, abused/depressed women were 5.4 times more likely to experience sexual victimization as compared with not-abused/depressed women.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the variables that differentiate women in abusive and non-abusive dating relationships. Because it was expected that the presence of depression would account for some of these differences, women were separated into four groups based on their abuse and depression status. This type of design allowed for a direct comparison of women in abusive and non-abusive relationships, without the confounding effects of depression. Group comparisons were made on several dimensions. The following areas were examined: interpersonal functioning, assertiveness, social support, coping, family violence, and past sexual victimization. The findings in each of these areas are reviewed and compared with current literature.

This study found that 21.3% of the total sample reported either current or previous involvement in an abusive dating relationship, a figure similar to that found in prior research (Cate et al., 1982; Pedersen & Thomas, 1992). Of these women, 10.3% reported current involvement in an abusive relationship while 11% reported previous involvement in such a relationship. Unlike past research, the present study sought to examine the differences between abused and non-abused dating women while controlling for depression. This study found statistically significant differences between abused and non-abused women with regard to coping, social support, and past sexual victimization.

In line with initial expectations, it was found that abused women had poorer coping strategies as compared with non-abused women. Specifically, the present study found that abused/depressed women utilized self-isolation (as indicated by items such as

"I try to keep my feelings to myself" and "I avoid being with people in general") as a coping strategy more frequently than their non-abused/depressed counterparts. Clements and Sawhney (2000) reported that women in violent marriages tend to employ higher levels of avoidant coping as compared with women in non-violent marriages. This finding has been supported consistently in past research (Golding, 1999). Claerhout et al. (1982) for instance, reported findings that battered women generated more avoidant and dependent responses than their nonbattered controls. In addition, Finn (1985) reported that often battered women simply ignore relationship problems when they arise. These findings clearly support the notion that battered women employ avoidant coping more frequently than nonbattered women. Corroborating this finding, the results of the present study suggest that abused/depressed women employ avoidant coping more frequently than their non-abused and depressed counterparts. Thus, even though college women tend to have more supportive resources available to them as compared with battered women, both groups may display very similar coping strategies when dealing with conflict. However, it is of interest that if women are abused and not depressed, this finding is not replicated.

Past research in the area of coping among battered women has unequivocally suggested that battered women tend to employ poorer coping strategies as compared with non-battered women (Claerhout et al. 1982). Specifically, research has established a relationship between victims of sexual abuse and greater levels of emotion-focused coping (i.e., avoidance, fantasy construction, and wishful thinking) as opposed to problem-focused coping (Long & Jackson, 1993). The present study's finding regarding

wishful thinking as a coping strategy confirms past research on coping among sexually abused women. It was found that abused/non-depressed women employed wishful thinking more frequently than non-abused/non-depressed women. However, it is peculiar that abused/depressed women did not use wishful thinking more often than their non-abused and depressed counterparts. This lack of wishful thinking among abused/depressed women stands in stark contrast to the literature on coping and depression, namely that depressed individuals' coping styles are characterized by wishful thinking (Coyne, Aldwin, & Lazarus, 1981). Future research should more carefully examine the relationship between experiencing abuse within a dating relationship and the use of emotion-focused coping. Particular attention should be paid to a woman's depression status, as this variable seemed to have differentiated whether an abused woman engaged in wishful thinking as a coping style.

The present study's findings regarding coping strategies are congruent with the literature on battered women. However, the findings regarding social support do not corroborate past research. That is, in this study, abused/non-depressed women had more social support from both friends and family as compared with their non-abused/non-depressed counterparts. Past research with battered women has consistently found increasing levels of battering to be associated with greater isolation and decreased social support. Results from the present study reveal that decreased social support is not as descriptive of women in abusive dating relationships as it is of women in abusive spousal relationships. Several factors may help account for these disparate findings. The vast majority of abused women in this study tended to have experienced the less severe items

on the Conflict Tactics Scale. This may explain why there would be few differences among abused and non-abused women in the study. However, it does not explain the differences we did find. That is, it doesn't explain why abused/non-depressed women had more social support as compared with non-abused/non-depressed women. It is possible that the abused women in this study actively solicited social support from friends and family as a result of the abuse. In line with this idea, it is likely that the supportive nature of a college environment, where most women have at least one roommate and friends within a proximal distance, may have contributed to abused/non-depressed women's increased social support. For instance, it is conceivable that an abused woman may have returned to her room after a violent episode with her partner and solicited comfort and advice from her roommate(s). It is also possible that many of the abused women reporting increased social support from friends and family were in the early stages of the abusive relationship. The average time spent in an abusive relationship for women in this study was approximately one and a half years. Comparatively, battered women spend significantly more time in the abusive relationship. It is possible that during the initial stages of abuse, friends and family may intervene and attempt to coerce the woman to leave the abusive relationship. However, as time transpires and the relationship persists, friends and family may stop trying to help the woman, succumbing to the fact that she does not appear responsive to their advice. Thus, time spent in an abusive relationship may affect the degree to which a woman has access to social support. It would be interesting to determine if this elevated amount of social support would persist if the women remained in their abusive relationships. Studying these

women prospectively may reveal that as the length of the abusive relationship increases, these women gradually exhibit diminished support from friends and family. Future research should more thoroughly examine the relationship between duration of abuse and social support among women in abusive dating relationships.

In addition to differences in coping and social support, the present study found statistically significant differences between abused and non-abused women with regard to past sexual victimization. Specifically, it was found that abused women, regardless of depression status, were significantly more likely to have experienced sexual victimization as compared with their non-abused counterparts. This finding is congruent with the literature on battered women. That is, victims of marital abuse are significantly more likely to have experienced sexual victimization in the past (Painter & Farrington, 1998). Future research should examine the role sexual victimization plays in influencing a woman's risk to experience violence in an intimate relationship. Previous research in this area has prospectively examined the role childhood and adolescent sexual assault plays in increasing a woman's risk for subsequent sexual assault during college (Gidycz, Hanson, & Layman, 1995). Research should now examine whether past sexual victimization increases a woman's risk for physical victimization in the context of a dating relationship.

Although violence in one's family of origin did not yield statistically significant results, discussion of the data trends is warranted. The trend toward abused women experiencing more violence in their families of origin (from both parents) supports the social learning theory of interpersonal violence. According to this theory, exposure to violence as a child predisposes one to either receive or perpetrate violence as an adult

(Bank & Burraston, 2001). There is a significant body of research that suggests children who suffer maltreatment are more likely to become antisocial as adolescents and violent as adults (McCord, 1983; Reid, Taplan, & Lorber, 1981). Unfortunately, this body of research is plagued with a variety of methodological flaws due to reliance on retrospective study designs, difficulty in developing operational definitions of child maltreatment, and frequent utilization of nonrepresentative samples. As such, future research in this area should study the effects of child maltreatment prospectively and draw from both clinical and community samples.

Summary

The purpose of the present study was to assess differences between abused and non-abused women in a dating relationship. Because it was expected that depression may account for many of these differences, women were separated into one of four groups based on their abuse and depression status. The major findings suggest that abused women differ from non-abused women on a variety of factors. Two significant findings arose in regard to coping. It was found that abused/depressed women employed wishful thinking and self-isolation more often than non-abused/depressed women. In addition to differences in coping styles, there were significant differences between abused and non-abused women in regard to social support. It was found that abused/non-depressed women had more support from both friends and family as compared with their non-abused/non-depressed counterparts. Finally, it was found that regardless of depression status, abused women were significantly more likely to have experienced sexual victimization as compared with non-abused women.

The findings from the present study add to the current literature on dating violence. These findings are significant in that they represent a direct examination of the correlates of physical abuse in a dating relationship. Past research has failed to control for depression, and has thus been confounded by its effects. The present study, however, separated women into one of four categories based on both abuse and depression status. As such, the findings generated from this study clearly depict the correlates of involvement in an abusive relationship after controlling for depression.

Limitations of the Present Study and Directions for Future Research

A major limitation of this study is the use of self-report instruments to assess a wide range of interpersonal, attitudinal, personality and past history variables. It is possible that our results may have been influenced by factors such as social desirability. The use of structured diagnostic assessments in which rapport is established may help to eliminate the influence of social desirability factors.

Another limitation arose because this study employed retrospective data. As a consequence, generalizability of the findings is limited because they are based on each respondent's ability to accurately remember and describe her abusive experiences. That is, the frequency and severity of abuse reported at the time of assessment may not have captured the exact experience of the abuse at the time of its occurrence. For instance, a woman may have used avoidance or dissociation to cope with the immediate emotional impact of an abusive incident even though she may typically cope with stressful situations by focusing on the problem. To determine the relative saliency of particular

coping styles, it would be useful to identify women at high risk for involvement in an abusive dating relationship and assess their styles of coping in a prospective manner.

A third major limitation of this study was that several variables were examined and the sample sizes of the abused groups (40 and 26) were considerably smaller than the sizes of the non-abused groups (128 and 114), resulting in diminished statistical power. It is possible that with larger sample sizes, and therefore greater statistical power, more of the findings would have been statistically significant.

A fourth limitation of the study was the cut-off score for the BDI-II was possibly too lenient. The cut-off score employed by the study was 14, which indicates mild depression. Using the parameter of 14, 61% of the women in the abused group qualified as depressed, while 53% of the women in the not-abused group qualified as depressed. A more stringent cut-off score may have made the differences between abused and non-abused women more prominent.

Finally, the results of the present study are limited to college women. This sample may not be representative of most women experiencing violence in the context of a dating relationship. In addition, college students, particularly those in their first year, may be more vulnerable to physical abuse in a dating relationship than the general population. This vulnerability may be due to various factors, including freedom from parental supervision, availability of drugs and alcohol, insecurity, and pressure to date (Warshaw, 1988). Due to this limitation, it would be useful to survey a community sample of victims of dating violence.

Implications

Recent years have seen an explosion in the number of prevention programs designed to decrease the occurrence of sexual assault among women. However, the number of programs designed specifically to decrease the occurrence of physical assault among women is scarce. Given the high co-occurrence of physical and sexual assault within dating relationships, prevention programs need to be established that address both of these components of assault. Such programs need to be enacted on two levels: the community level and the individual level. In regard to community prevention strategies it is necessary to reduce societal tolerance of partner violence. It is necessary to increase public awareness of the problem, and generally try to reduce acceptance of aggression in intimate relationships. On the individual level, it is necessary for prevention programs to educate both men and women about violent behaviors in the hope that they will not become perpetrators or victims of intimate violence. Because past research has established that dating violence begins relatively early (i.e., 15-16 years of age), these programs must be made available to youth. School-based programs targeting teens would facilitate an early awareness of this problem.

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